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CPL Podcast: Classroom Management 7-12

Host: Carly Boreland

With: Lloyd Bowen

INTRODUCTION:

You are listening to the JPL Podcast from the Centre for Professional Learning. Here's your host, Carly Boreland.

Carly Boreland:

Welcome to the JPL Podcast for the Centre for Professional Learning. I'm Carly Boreland, and I'm the editor of the Journal of Professional Learning. Today I'm talking with Lloyd Bowen about classroom management and effective teaching for improved classroom management as well. Lloyd is a secondary teacher. He has been a head teacher mentor and head teacher of teaching and learning as well, and he's got a range of things to talk about with us today including how to manage your classroom if you're a casual teacher, how to work in classrooms where you might be moving between rooms, and some hints and tips that he's picked up over the years from a range of colleagues and in a range of different settings in New South Wales public schools. So welcome Lloyd.

Lloyd Bowen:

Thank you.

Carly Boreland:

Lloyd, how many teachers have you observed over your career, would you say?

Lloyd Bowen:

Because I've been very lucky and being in positions that allow me to observe, and because I try to observe so that I can get better, I would have to say about 100.

Carly Boreland:

So you sat in classrooms and you watched teachers trying out a range of strategies across different subjects?

Lloyd Bowen:

Yes, spot on. So I've sat in many classrooms, watched teachers of various career stages and various subjects try strategies. Not only has this been empowering 'cause I've learned a lot of things, but it gives you great faith in teaching because the vast majority of teachers are good and there's a huge amount to learn from.



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Carly Boreland:

We're here today specifically to talk about classroom management and how that is connected to teaching and to get some tips from you of things that you've seen people try and that have worked. It can be quite an emotional thing for a teacher if their class is not working the way they want it to, and it can cause problems and it can leave you wondering, Is this the job for me? What have you learned in your time so far working with different teachers as you've seen them struggling and maybe even yourself as you've sometimes felt those feelings?

Lloyd Bowen:

It is a very personal thing. Teaching is a unique profession in that when we're in that room, we're usually the only professional in the room, we're the only teacher, there's nowhere to hide. The lack of a better analogy, it's a bit like boxing I suppose, we all have days or periods within the day where it's tough, and I think even the most expert and experienced teachers would still have those days where it's tough. As frustrated as we get, it's usually best to stay calm unless there's a safety issue or something, but usually best to stay calm as we can. If that means, that we need to take ten deep breaths, then so be it.

I've also observed in really difficult classroom management situations that when students are engaged in learning, so when a lot of effort's been put into making the learning authentic and meaningful for students, classroom management is infinitely easier. And in those situations, we can use a lot of non-verbal things and it controls the energy in the room. That's when things like positioning ourselves in the classroom, that we all do, but they work far more effectively when the students are on task. We can train our students so that if we stand in a certain spot, they know that we just want them to focus and they're not in trouble.

We can use the signs in the room. If we don't have our own room, I've never had my own room, but we can know the rooms that we're in and know where the visual cues are in the room that we can use, and it allows us to control the energy to try and reduce those times where we do get frustrated. It doesn't eliminate them, nothing will, but it allows us to reduce them.

Carly Boreland:

When you think about your classroom's setting, what are the things that you're aiming for? What are you trying to achieve in terms of student behaviour in your classroom?

Lloyd Bowen:

Ultimately, what I'm trying to achieve is happy young people in my class engaged in learning. I want them to be interested in what they're learning about. I want them to be able to understand how they can use that in the wider world and in wider contexts. I want them to have a smile on their face when they turn up. I want them to have a smile on their face when they leave. I want them to feel happy as people and comfortable and confident in the learning space. To do that, we need to focus on them as



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people first, so I spend a lot of time learning what my students like and trying to find that hook to get them interested.

Carly Boreland:

Lloyd, can you take us through your top five strategies that anyone could try, and then we might also talk about how long do you try something for and how long does it take to get something to work or to decide to give up on that thing as well.

Lloyd Bowen:

Sure. All of the things that I do in my class are not original. They're all things that I've seen other people do, and I've seen that they work. Sometimes they work within a week, sometimes they work within a term, but different things require a different amount of time. One of the things that I have to force myself to do is to continually stop and look around the class, and there's a few reasons for that. It's really easy in teaching to get distracted by the needy students, and the loud students, and find ourselves bouncing from student to student and not noticing two-thirds of the room. So I literally count to three between students and scan the room to try and get a sense of whether students are engaging and learning, to see the quieter students that are nice people, but they don't put their hand up and they don't get it, and I need to make sure that I get to them.

The other thing it does, is it helps me see when students are starting to drift off class and it might be a cue to move on to the next activity, or it might be a cue for me to go over and explain something to them in a different way or get them to do something slightly different. So stopping and looking is definitely in the top five.

The other one in the top five is controlling the energy in the room. As a teacher, sometimes it feels like students control the energy, but we actually control it. When we gain the class' attention, if we need to use a loud voice so be it, but taking a good solid pause, and then trying again a bit quieter, and getting quieter and quieter, and then ultimately, we'll be controlling them to be listening and we can speak really quietly.

Another thing that I do, and I've noticed a couple of teachers do this and I stole it from them, is to have a spot in the room and I only stand in this spot when I want the class to refocus, if I can see that a significant portion of the class is off-task. It's a good task, I like the task, they like the task so I know they should be doing it, I'll stand at the classroom door, every room has a door. And I train my students to know that when I'm standing there, they're not in trouble, I'm not in trouble, I just want them to focus. After a little while, that works. I've had one class where it works within a week. I've had others where it takes five or six weeks. But ultimately, it's always worked for me.

Number four. I would have to say being organised myself. So coming to class prepared, you could say this was number one I suppose, that I carry a toolbox and it's got pencils and everything in it. It makes me feel prepared, it makes me feel confident, it makes me feel comfortable, but it also means that the little tiny things that can distract us in class, don't. So students know that they can go to my toolbox



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and can get out a pen or a pencil, I don't mind. I don't really even mind if it comes back, to be honest. I just want their focus to be on learning.

The other thing that I think is really important is visuals. That can range from having an agenda on the board so that students know where we're going, to posters in the room, to samples of student work, anything that's visual that communicates what we want our students to do. So in an ideal world, it's going to be about their learning. So it's going to be visuals about what they need to do. So it could be printouts of the key verbs around the room so they know what describe, and outline and all that stuff is. It could be some class values that we have, whether they're around respect, or being creative, or whatever it is, but then print it around the room.

A really good Maths teacher, I used to work with, had a number line from negative ten to positive ten that she used all the time, and it allowed students to see the negative to the positive and so on. But visual cues are unbelievable. They're also really good when we're trying to control the energy in the room. If we can use them instead of our voice, it changes the focus and changes the focus to what we want students to do.

Carly Boreland:

Lloyd, all of the things that you've talked about so far are about not just managing the classroom for the sake of it, but to enable the students to learn more, to maximise the time that they're spending on learning. Can you tell us a bit about that relationship between what you need from the students in order to be able to have them focusing on their work and what you need to do as the teacher to make that possible? So we've talked already about getting to know the students, how important is knowing their names and those sorts of things, especially if you're a casual teacher where you might not have all that time?

Lloyd Bowen:

The reality is that none of these things that I've been speaking about work unless we've got an effectively planned lesson that interests the students. If we've got a really boring lesson plan, there's no strategy in the world that's going to help you manage the classroom and have the students learning. The focus should always be on the student learning, I'm far less interested in how that happens. Students need to learn to be a functioning member of society. What we have, as teachers, is a moral responsibility to ensure that our students go into the wide world knowing how things work, but more importantly, understanding that they have the ability to learn about more than just themselves and how to contribute to society. So we need from them, an open mind, and we need to learn from ourselves how to open that mind.

Part of that is getting to know the student, the other part is knowing their community, and knowing their background, and knowing their values. It's also knowing what the wider community expects. It's about knowing the knowledge and skills that they need. Different teachers will have different ways to



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do this. In high school, different subjects approach different bits. Ideally, if we can link those bits together, they'll leave with far better ability to cope with the ups and downs of life than if we don't.

Carly Boreland:

That reminds me so much of... it's almost become a bit outdated now because there's so many other things that have come up in its place, but that notion of significance and quality teaching going back to some of those more basic things about the higher order thinking and those sorts of things as part of planning a lesson. Do you still use the Quality Teaching Framework?

Lloyd Bowen:

Yes, I still use the Quality Teaching Framework a lot. I use it for my own personal reflection. I use it when I develop assessment tasks. I've been involved with quality teaching rounds at my current school which are incredibly valuable. The thing I like about the quality teaching framework is it gives a tangible research informed background to what we can do as teachers, and it gives a meaningful way to think about learning and what it should be doing.

So in terms of significance, if we can make it relevant to the students' cultural background, if we can take into consideration their background knowledge, if we can involve a narrative in what they're doing, so that's not necessarily just storytelling, but perhaps a project-based learning opportunity where they have a specific role and their narrative is to develop a product for a client. I see the Quality Teaching Framework, it's been around for quite a while, but I see it as still important.

Carly Boreland:

Oftentimes, there are strategies that you can use and it doesn't matter whether you've been in the classroom for a short time or a long time, whether it's your classroom, whether you know the school or not, there are some things that you can work on and try, and you can decide, is that working or isn't it working?

I think high school is a particular challenge with being a new teacher in a school and being a casual teacher. Can you give us some suggestions? I know you've worked a lot with early career teachers in quite challenging school circumstances and community circumstances. Can you help us out a little bit with that?

Lloyd Bowen:

There's no doubt that being new to a school, whether that be a new permanent or casual teacher, is hard, and it's harder when you haven't established yourself in a school. It's particularly difficult for casual teachers because oftentimes, casual teachers aren't planning what's delivered, they're delivering somebody else's work. And if they're working across three or four schools, it's very difficult to get to know the students so it is harder.



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A lot of the things that I've talked about today, they work for casual teachers, but they work when casual teachers are working in a common school or a couple of schools. Some things that I've used before I became permanent and some things I've also asked good casual teachers I know, what they do, and some key things came through and preparation was one of them.

Oftentimes, a casual will come to school and there'll be really good work left and everything will go swimmingly. Other times that may not be the case. So things like the toolbox I spoke about earlier, having those sort of resources prepared are useful, but also, a go-to-kit of learning activities for students that ideally is across KLAs, that if work runs out from a teacher that's been left or if they haven't left any work, you've got something that's still meaningful to do. A find-a-word might cut it for a little bit, but it's not going to cut it for very long. So it needs to be meaningful not only in terms of passing the time, but meaningful to the students at their stage, and that's certainly possible for a casual teacher to do.

The other thing is getting to know students. It's very difficult for casual teachers to know students really well. It is possible to know some key students' names. If a casual teacher is working in one or two schools, they should be able to know, within a reasonable amount of time, a quarter to a third of the class names. That's not unrealistic to expect. Once they know those names, they can quietly use those names when asking questions. I'm not just talking about the naughty kids, but also the good kids, some go-to-kids. When you're trying to stimulate a discussion, you can go to those as well.

Carly Boreland:

There's a raft of suggestions there and I've seen different things online about strategies for learning names and making connections so that you do have a few names at least to begin with in any classroom. The power of using somebody's name can be really helpful, can't it?

Lloyd Bowen:

Everybody is a little bit egocentric in a little way, and teenagers are particularly so. If they hear their name, their 'cocktail hearing' will come out for sure, and they will respond. I remember when I first started teaching, I used to get them to write their name on the top of every page. That worked for a little while, it didn't work for very long, but it was long enough for me to get to know a few of their key names. It's far more helpful knowing their names when you're trying to stimulate an engaging environment than when the environment is turned a little bit pear-shaped, but heaps more helpful when we're trying to stimulate that overall positive environment. Students feel like we know them when we know their names. They feel like the learning environment is a safe place for them, they feel like it's a comfortable place for them if we've taken the time to get to know their name.

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Carly Boreland:

If we jump a bit further down into the lesson or maybe we're lucky enough and we've had our own class for little while, I want to ask you about, how do we know when it's time to ask for help, and how do we know when it's time to try something new or that the thing we've tried is not working? So I think there's a value in consistency and persisting, and how do we know when it might be time to look for something else or maybe that's not working?

Lloyd Bowen:

In terms of asking for help, it's never too soon. It is never ever too soon. I think having those ongoing professional discussions with our fellow teachers is really important. I would be having chats with my colleagues about classes right from the get-go, and I'm not talking about nit-picking about individual students, but more starting from students strengths, that teacher that had the class the year before, getting to understand that the students have strengths in particular areas. That's a really good basis to go to those help conversations that might happen later.

Oftentimes, if a class starts turning a little bit pear-shaped, it will be the result of a handful of students, and often, they might be causing the same trouble elsewhere. Having a discussion with our colleagues, our teacher colleagues, about what's going on is a really good idea. It's never too soon to ask. The only caution I'd say is it can be too soon to get somebody else in the classroom. I think that as teachers, it's really important that our presence and our, I don't want to say authority, but I guess that's what I mean, is maintained in the room.

If we have a lesson that turns pear-shaped and we get the Head Teacher to come in the very next period, all of a sudden, the relationships we've built up have been chipped away a little bit. I mean, there may come a time where we need to do that, but it's far better to have conversations first, so have a chat with our Head Teacher, or a Year Adviser, or the Counsellor, whoever, and get some ideas for strategies to try first before getting somebody else to come in. In terms of strategies, they need time to work too. If we just try a strategy once and it doesn't work, well, most strategies aren't going to work the first time, they need time to work. So depending on what it is, I would give it at least a couple of weeks, and then go back to the person who suggested the strategy and say, "Look, I'm trying it, but it's not really working.", and they might say, "It took me a month.", or they might say, "It should be working by now". They might say, "Oh that's interesting, why don't we talk about something else." Because not every strategy works for every teacher, and every classroom, and every student. So it might be an ongoing discussion.

Carly Boreland:

Would that be maybe also a time for lesson observations or doing something like that too?

Lloyd Bowen:

Yes. I really like the idea of a positive professional culture where we're in each other's classrooms all the time. And in that context, when a teacher comes in, no matter who it is, as an observation, students



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think nothing of it. They're not thinking that they've been naughty, they're thinking, "This is just normal." When it's new, the students will always ask, Why are you in here? Are you in here to check up on us?" I mean, there's lots of really easy responses to overcome that. The good thing about observations is it gives a really good evidence base to found a conversation on. So if there's a class that I'm struggling with or topic that I'm struggling with, getting a colleague to come in and have a look at what I'm doing, and then looking at the teaching and looking at the learning, not at me as a person, even if we focus it on the teaching and the learning, it's very powerful, and usually, we'll find better ways forward if they've got that evidence base to go with.

Carly Boreland:

Something in my experience that I've seen which can be very powerful is the willingness of the teacher to repair a relationship with a student after there's been a problem. Can you talk a little about that dynamic after maybe there's been some problem? What happens after there's been some situation that's been difficult?

Lloyd Bowen:

We need to remember that a big part of teaching is relationships. Usually in a relationship, if there's a little altercation there's going to be fault on at least one side. As teachers, we're people and we make mistakes too. I remember a few years ago, a Year 10 boy asked me for a pencil, and I was just tired, and I snapped at him and belittled him in front of the class, and I truly regretted it and sincerely feel bad about it to the point when the next day I publicly apologised to him in front of the class. In that context, it was an important thing to do, cause I was in the wrong. It didn't make me look smaller. It didn't make me look bigger either. It just was the appropriate thing to do.

Usually, if we make a mistake as a teacher, it is important that we show our students, who are young people that are learning about life, that people do make mistakes and we take responsibility for it. If we find ourselves frustrated and we respond to a situation that was perhaps more than what we would have hoped for, to acknowledge that with the student and have a conversation I think is important, but to let them know that they've got responsibility too.

So to say, "Look, the way I dealt with that wasn't right. This is what I should have done." is really positive from the teacher's point of view, but also for the student, for the teacher than to say, "This is why I reacted this way, and this is what we need you to do to help you learn."

Carly Boreland:

And the power of a fresh start too. To just say, "Let's move on."

Lloyd Bowen:

What I was just talking about then is rare. Most teachers do the right thing the vast majority of the time. I think what we're talking about mostly is when students do the wrong thing. It's important that they know that the next time they come to class, it's a fresh start. So if we've given them a consequence,



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whatever the consequence is, perhaps an afternoon of detention, whatever it is, they should know that that's the consequence and that's it. Once they've done that, or once that's been issued, the next time they come to class it's a fresh start. It's an opportunity to just start a discussion about their learning again. It's not a time for us to focus on the behaviour. It's the time to focus on the learning.

Carly Boreland:

Can you talk to us a bit more about that? When you see a problem, I've heard really good suggestions about focus the behaviour, not on the person and things like that. What's that about?

Lloyd Bowen:

I guess, as people, if we're in a relationship, and we're talking to somebody that we care about, and they start talking about us and not the behaviours, all of a sudden, we back up into a corner, and I think it's a similar principle in teaching. If we're talking with a student about their behaviour and it's their behaviour, they can focus their energy on the behaviour, not themselves.

By 'the behaviour' I mean, the reflective sort of processes. If we focus on them and call them naughty and all those sort of things, there's nowhere for them to go but to back themselves into the corner and we can very easily find it escalating to where we don't want it to go. Whereas if we focus on the behaviour, and why the behaviour is not helpful to their learning, and that behaviour might need consequences, it might just need a chat, who knows, but if we focus on that, the odds of there being a successful outcome are higher. There are some students that need a lot more help and that's the reality of it. But most students will respond to a talk about the behaviour.

Carly Boreland:

A problematic behaviour is something changeable. Whereas a personality, well... That's going to be hard to resolve on period five on a Friday.

Lloyd Bowen:

It's going to be hard to resolve anytime, you're absolutely right. A behaviour is changeable, it's an action. Whereas if we start talking about the person, I mean, we can't change who we are.

Carly Boreland:

There are probably lots of good things that you could like about that person too.

Lloyd Bowen:

Everybody has strengths.

Carly Boreland:

Something I think we could get to as well, you've tried your different ideas for the classroom, you've planned your lessons as well as you can, you've given things time to work, you've spoken in, at least



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initially, with your Head Teacher, immediate supervisor and other colleagues about this particular student. Where else can we go in the school for help?

Lloyd Bowen:

We often feel alone as teachers, and it's unfortunate because we're not. There's a huge number of very capable and very willing people within a school to help us. That can range from our classroom teacher, colleagues, to our supervising Head Teacher, to our Deputy Principal, Head Teacher Welfare, Year Advisers, Learning and Support Teacher, the Learning and Support Team, the Welfare Team, the list goes on, and on, and on.

People in education like to help. Everyone's busy and so they'll look busy, but if we ask them a question, so not asking them to do something for us but ask them a question, they're nearly always going to find time to help us. That's why people are in teaching. If we go up to them and say, "Little Johnny or little Jane is a really big problem for me. Can you take them out of my class for six weeks?", they're not going to want to do that. But if you go up and say, "Look, I'm really struggling with this student. Do you know any background information about them?", they're going to be very, very forthcoming.

It's really important too from a point of view of support for the student as a person, particularly in a high school. It's quite easy for teachers to think that they're mucking up to them or not engaged in learning for them, but it could be a pattern across the school, and if we don't ask or if we don't document it, the people that need to take the action to help that person, as in the student, aren't going to know. Sometimes asking for help is actually helping the student as well as ourselves.

Carly Boreland:

Lloyd, thank you so much. It's been wonderful chatting with you today and thank you for your hints and tips that you've gathered from other teachers for many years.

Lloyd Bowen:

Thank you for letting me share the things I've stolen.

Carly Boreland:

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CONCLUSION:

The JPL Podcast is produced by the Centre for Professional Learning and the New South Wales Teachers Federation. All opinions expressed in this podcast are those of the individual speakers and do not necessarily represent the views of their employer or associated organisations. The host was Carly Boreland; technical direction by Jason Nicholas.



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Lloyd Bowen currently works as Head Teacher Teaching and Learning and teaches TAS Industrial Arts at a High School in Sydney. He commenced this position in 2016 after being a class room teacher and working as Head Teacher: Teacher Mentor at Chifley College Bidwill and Mt Druitt campuses. In this position Lloyd supported over 60 teachers in their first few years in the profession in all matters relating to teaching including classroom management and accreditation.